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Railroad Valley Springfish Habitat Improvement Project Scoping Document

Austin-Tonopah Ranger District
Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
Nye County, Nevada
Responsible Official: Lance Brown
District Ranger

For Information Contact: Rachel Van horne
Project Team Leader



Comments Welcome

The US Forest Service, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Austin-Tonopah Ranger District is planning a project to improve an un-named spring and outflow conditions for Railroad Valley springfish located in Hot Creek Canyon. This scoping document describes the purpose and need for the project, the project location, and a preliminary treatment proposal so that you can provide comments and help to improve the project. Instructions on how to comment and who to contact for more information are at the end of this document.

The responsible official for the Railroad Valley Springfish Habitat Improvement Project is Lance Brown, District Ranger on Austin-Tonopah Ranger District. Federal regulations allow the US Forest Service to exclude from documentation in an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) categories of actions that do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment, based on the agency's experience and knowledge. Unless extraordinary circumstances are found to exist, the proposed action falls under the category listed at 36 CFR 220.6(e)(6): *"Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction."*

Section 106 under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended, requires federal agencies such as the US Forest Service to identify and consider potential effects of its actions on historic properties. This is done through a collaborative framework of seeking, discussing, and considering views of the public on how potential adverse effects on historic properties resulting from a proposed Federal action should be addressed. The Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest will be using the NEPA scoping process in lieu of public involvement requirements found in 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the NHPA (54 U.S.C. 306108).

The proposed action description and other information are available for review at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=60322> ; or upon request by calling 775-482-6286.

Purpose and Need for the Project

The purpose of the spring enhancement project is to improve habitat conditions for Railroad Valley springfish, a Federally Threatened protected species under the Endangered Species Act. This population of Railroad Valley springfish (springfish) is non-endemic to this spring site and considered non-essential for species recovery and is consistent with the 1986 Toiyabe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan as amended¹, and Recovery Plan for Railroad Valley Springfish (1996).

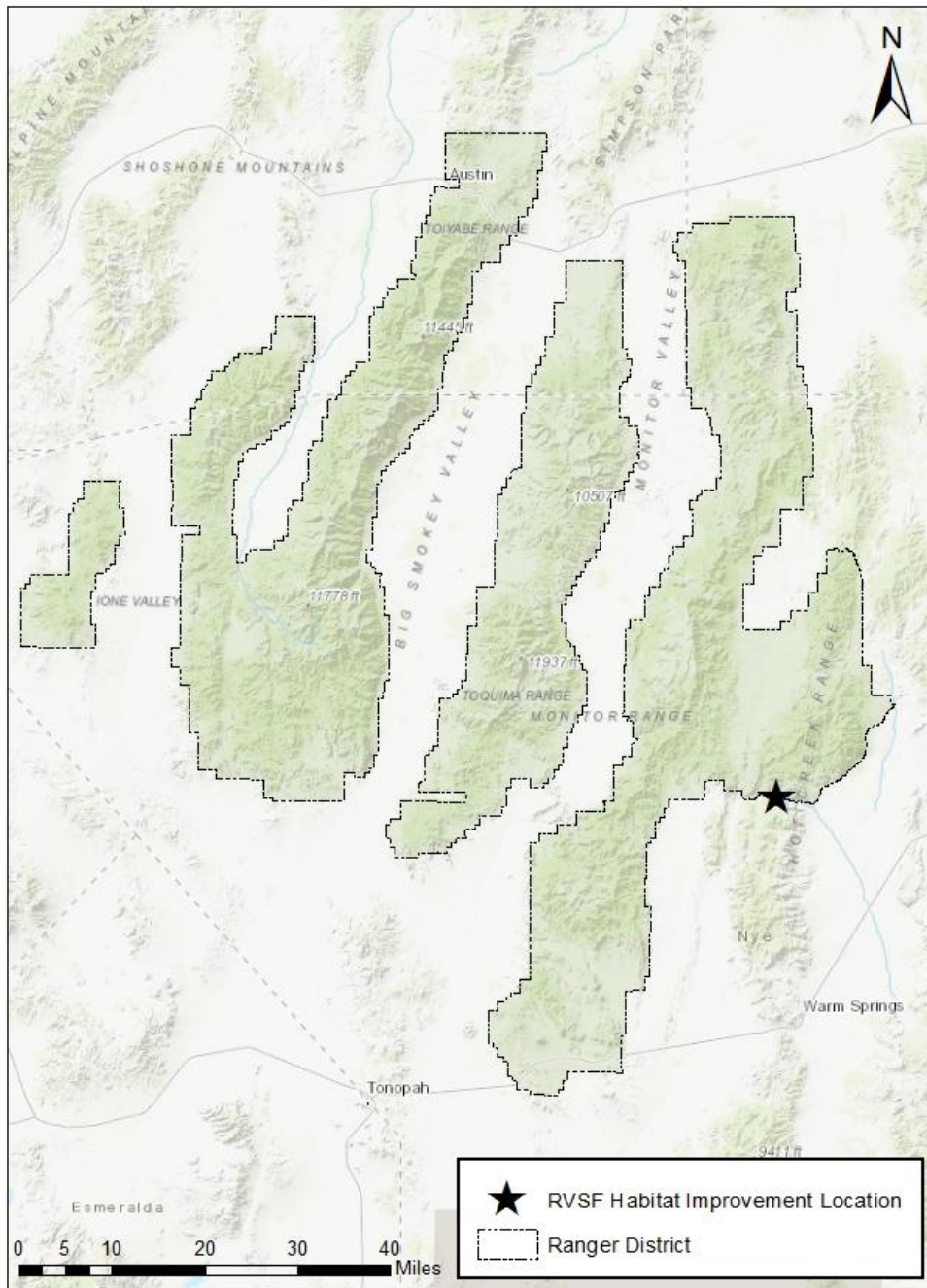
This project is needed because Hot Creek Canyon is a narrow, confined canyon that separates Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management administered lands. Private lands occur in the canyon bottom to the east of the project area and will not be affected. This geography creates a bottleneck for livestock, wild horses, and big game animals where several springs throughout the canyon receive heavy utilization on riparian habitats causing impacts to spring sources. Implementing this project will protect the spring source for this springfish population and provide management options for improving and maintaining springfish habitat, while still providing down channel water source.

¹ 1986 Toiyabe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan available at http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5143054.pdf

Project Location

The project is located on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Austin-Tonopah Ranger District, in Nye County, Nevada. The established road system in Hot Creek Canyon in the project area separates Forest Service and BLM administered lands with Forest Service lands north of Road 800 (Map 1).

Figure 1. Project Vicinity map

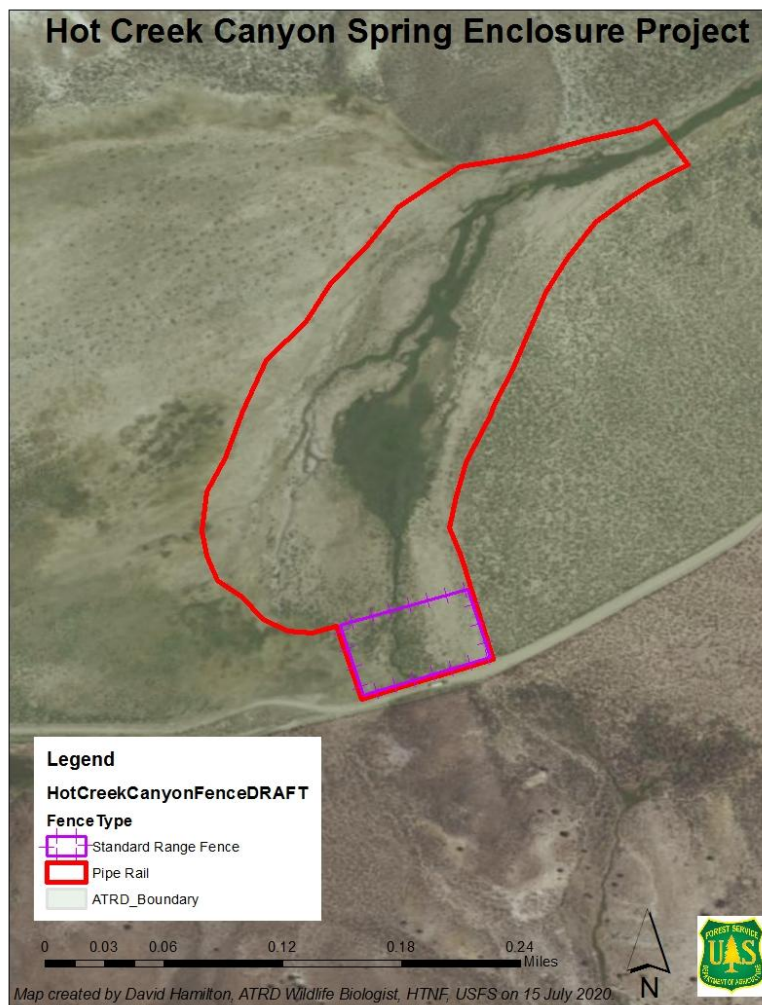


Preliminary Proposal

The Austin-Tonopah Ranger District proposes to construct a spring enclosure fence using two different range fence designs (standard barbed wire range fence and pipe-rail fence) to protect the spring head and allow for habitat management options with the outflow. The following is the description of the proposed fence enclosure and management needs:

1. Construct a small range barbed wire fence enclosure (approximately 1 acre) surrounding the spring source and a portion of the outflow where springfish occur. This is the primary habitat used by the springfish and will be constructed to excluded livestock and horses; and
2. Construct pipe-rail fence down the outflow for managed grazing access (estimated at 15 acres). This portion of the project would enhance and improve riparian condition with managing utilization levels. This section of the project area may provide periodic access with prescribed grazing, at the discretion of the District Ranger, for the purpose of maintaining high quality riparian habitat for springfish. Permitted use will only be authorized for improving habitat conditions, will be for a short duration with allowable use not exceeding 30%.

Figure 2. Project Map with proposed fence.



Ongoing Consultation and Coordination



This project site has been visited by Duckwater Tribal representation and reviewed for concerns. This project will be coordinated and consulted with Tribal leadership and will be submitted to Nevada SHPO for consultation, as required under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Additionally, the grazing Allotment permittee is supportive of the proposal with planning coordination ongoing.

Design Features

The Railroad Valley Springfish Habitat Improvement Project will be implemented in compliance with all standards and guidelines identified in the Toiyabe Forest Plan, including the 2016 Greater Sage-grouse Forest Plan Amendment. The following design features are specific to the project area and implementation:

Activities in Springfish Habitat

1. Minimize disturbance to springfish habitat during fence construction by remaining outside of the wetted habitat whenever possible.
2. Grazing will not be allowed until the habitat within the enclosure reaches a functioning condition.

Weed/Vehicle Management

1. Vehicles may not drive cross-country or off established routes.
2. Contract will require all vehicles and mechanical equipment to be cleaned prior to entry on National Forest lands, to remove all dirt, plant parts, and other material that could carry noxious weed seeds into the area.
3. Access and road conditions need to be travelable and avoid resource damage during wet conditions.

Cultural Resource Protection

1. Prior Heritage Class III survey of the project area found no heritage resources (those recommended eligible or unevaluated (contributing) for the National Register of Historic Places).
2. Duckwater Shoshone Tribe requested to be notified of the implementation so a tribal representative can visit the site, if available.

Migratory Birds/Timing of Operations

1. Treatments will not occur between March 1 and July 15 to avoid disturbance during sage-grouse breeding and nesting seasons and migratory bird nesting.
2. Access will be limited to existing roads and travelable to avoid resource damage during wet conditions.

Implementation (construction and future prescribed management)



Fence alignment will be flagged prior to construction, construction time will be approximately 3 days and will use of a contract crew or partners, equipment and material transport from road to fence placement will be done by hand, excess materials, trash, etc be returned to Ranger Station following completion.

How to Comment

The Forest is seeking comments to help improve this project. Comments would be most helpful if received by July 29, 2021. Comments can be submitted by mail, over the phone, in person with a pre-arranged drop off appointment, or by email.

Electronic comments must be submitted in an email message or attached in portable document format (.pdf) or Word (.docx) format and submitted to:

http://data.ecosystem-management.org/nepaweb/nepa_project_exp.php?project=60322

Use the “Comment on Project” link on the “Get Connected” Menu tab on the right side of the page. If uploading a file with comments, comments must be in the form of plain text (.txt), Word (.doc, .docx) or PDF (.pdf). Comments must have an identifiable name attached, or verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic comments.

Written comments should be submitted to the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Austin-Tonopah Ranger District, Attn: Lance Brown, PO Box 130, Austin, NV 89310. Oral and hand-delivered comments must be provided at the Responsible Official’s office during normal business hours (8:00 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays with a pre-arranged appointment). Drop-off appointments can be scheduled and telephone comments can be conducted with the Responsible Official at 775-293-0041.

Comments, names, and contact information of those who comment will be part of the public record for this project. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, the District will not be able to send further project information to anonymous commenters.

For More Information

For more information, please contact Rachel Van Horne, Project team leader, at rachel.vanhorne@usda.gov.

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